On the Translation Strategies of Images in Mao Zedong's Poems from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract

Mao Zedong is not only an excellent leader of China, but also a great poet. Mao Zedong's poems were written under a special social background, thus they possess infinite artistic and cultural values. They not only enjoy a high praise in the history of poetry in China, but also have a broad and deep influence around the world. From the Perspective of Skopos Theory, this paper makes a contrastive study on the English versions of Mao Zedong's poems, featuring the different images. We can make a conclusion that they have all achieved their translation purposes. Influenced by the cultural differences between China and the West, Barnstone's translation adopts literal translation, which meets the needs of western readers to a greater extent, while the Chinese official version adopts foreignization for its political demands. Xu Yuanchong's translation emphasizes the artistry of poetry and tends to adopt domestication. Obviously, due to different cultural and historical background, different translators have different translation purpose. To a large extent, translation purposes determine their translation strategies. Therefore, we should appreciate different translation versions dialectically under different historical background.

Keywords — *Mao Zedong's poems, English versions, images, skopos theory, translation strategies*

I. INTRODUCTION

Mao Zedong is not only an excellent leader of China, but also a great poet. Mao Zedong's poems were written under a special social background, thus they possess infinite artistic and cultural values. They not only enjoy a high praise in the history of poetry in China, but also have a broad and deep influence around the world. Mao Zedong's Poems have been translated into the different languages by many translators at home and abroad. There are more than 20 English versions. Under different historical background, different versions serve different purposes, while different purposes result in different translation strategies. From the perspective of Skopos Theory, three representative English versions have been chosen in this paper, i.e. Barnstone's version by Willis Barnstone in 1972, the Chinese official version

by Foreign Language Press of China in 1976 and Xu's version by Xu Yuanchong in 1993. The three versions are abbreviated as Barnstone's version, Chinese official version and Xu's version.

From the perspective of Skopos Theory, this paper aims to compare and analyze the translation strategies employed by the three translators, especially when translating the different images in Mao Zedong's poems. Skopos theory demands translators to put their translation purpose at the first place. Translators shouldn't passively accept the source text. Instead, they are supposed to have their opinions and aims to create a new understandable translation text. Knowing these differences, we can easily associate their translation purposes with social background, which result in different translation strategies.

II. SKOPOS THEORY

The Skopos theory is an approach to translation which was put forward by Hans J. Vermeer and developed in Germany in the late 1970s, orienting a more functional and sociocultural concept of translation. The skopos rule, the coherence rule and the fidelity rule are the three important rules in Skopos Theory. The skopos rule aims to study the relationship between translation and its skopos. The coherence rule emphasizes the relationship between target text and target circumstance. The fidelity rule discusses the relationship between target text and source text.

A. Skopos Rule

The word "skopos" derives from a Greek word which means purpose. According to Hans J. Vermeer, the most important rule of Skopos Theory for translation is the skopos rule. It considers that translation is a kind of human activities. What's more, the purpose of translation determines the translation strategies.

As a vital rule, the skopos rule decides what translation strategies should be used by different translators. Therefore, translators should figure out clearly the purpose of the translation work and the function of the target text.

The skopos rule is aimed to solve the argument between free translation and literal

translation. In addition, the skopos rule can keep a balance between dynamic equivalence and formal equivalence. What's more, the skopos rule is an important criterion to find out the difference between excellent translators and ordinary translators. The expectation of target readers is a main factor which decides the target text. In other words, the translation between different cultures is decided by the translation purpose, while the translation purpose changes with different target readers. When translating the source text, it is necessary to adjust the translation strategies in order to meet the expectations of target readers.

B. Coherence Rule

The coherence rule is a secondary rule of the skopos rule. It requires that the target text must conform to the standard of textual coherence. It means that the target text must be translated in a way that it is comprehensible for the target readers. In other words, target text should be acceptable and understandable.

The target text should be in accordance with the coherence rule. When the translator adopts the coherence rule, the target language must be coherent enough to allow the target readers to understand the whole text, although their cultural background is different from the source text readers. Only when the target readers can understand the target text, can it be viewed as a successful translation. That is to say, the translator should obey the coherent rule and appropriately adjust the syntactical structure or the choice of words in target language, in order to keep the original coherence.

C. Fidelity Rule

The fidelity rule means a relationship between the target text and the source text. This rule can also be named as inter-textual coherence, which is the requirement to the translator. The fidelity rule demands that there must be coherence between the source information and the translation of this information that is accessible to the target readers. The successful target text is to make the same influence on the target readers as it does on the original text. The fidelity rule can be extremely loyal to the source text. A qualified translator should not be short of the necessary knowledge of the source-language, and should keep the source culture in mind.

Generally speaking, among the three rules, fidelity rule is subordinate to coherence rule, because from the view of target readers, the target text should at least be easy to understand, then it could be compared with its source text. In addition, coherence rule and fidelity rule are subordinate to skopos rule. Skopos rule is the most important among three rules and the foundation of Skopos Theory.

III.CHARACTERISTICS OF MAO ZEDONG'S POEMS

As one of Mao's literary legacies, Mao Zedong's poems are of great value and they are not only the reflection of significant historical events but also the recordation of Mao Zedong's profound philosophy and revolutionary spirit. Before the comparative analysis, it is important for us to know about some typical characteristics of Mao Zedong's poems.

A. Rich Ideological Contents

As we all know, Mao Zedong's poems are closely related with Chinese revolution and the socialist construction. In his poems, Mao Zedong expresses his great ambition, profound philosophy and ardent aspiration. From 1915 to 1965, Mao Zedong composed over 80 poems, with 67 pieces published in public. Mao Zedong's poems have exposed great events in Chinese revolution of over 40 years led by Chinese Communist Party, including almost all the famous battles. Mao Zedong's poems were endowed with lofty ideology and historical significance, so these poems should be called the revolutionary epic. It is easy to find that Mao Zedong's Poems are a magnificent apotheosis of the harmonious integration of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism.

B. Vivid Language Expressions

Based on the classical Chinese literature, Mao Zedong has an excellent control of words and expressions, especially rhetoric devices including metaphor, hyperbole, metonymy and so on. Because of spiritual sense and excellent expression skills in Mao Zedong's Poems, people all around the world cherish his poems highly. The influence of Chinese classical poetry on Mao Zedong's poems is reflected not only in style, but also in language. In Mao Zedong's poems, we can know that he is a bright language master. He often adopts appropriate expressions to make the whole poem vivid and lively. Mao Zedong is proficient in Chinese history, culture and geography. Thus, his poems possess extensive historical background, profound philosophical connotation and important literary value.

C. Unique Artistic Style

Mao Zedong's Poems are regarded as a harmonious integration of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism. It is well known

that Mao Zedong's poems are characterized by the great energy, power and magnificence. Mao Zedong's poems are mostly written in the traditional style that is affected by Chinese classical poetry since this type of literary form has come into being. Chinese classical poetry, especially its romantic and realistic style, had great effect on Mao Zedong's poems. Mao Zedong sets a great example of integrating revolutionary realism and romanticism in his poems. To a certain extent, his poems tend to be more romantic. It is clear that the diction is successful in Mao Zedong's poems. He borrowed words from classical literary works, popular idioms and folk songs. As a result, he created a unique artistic style in his poems.

IV. DIFFERENCES IN TRANSLATION OF IMAGES IN MAO ZEDONG'S POEMS

Images play a crucial role in Mao Zedong's poems and images are regarded as the core of his poems. As we all know, Mao Zedong employed a lot of images in his poems. He takes advantages of different images to express his emotions and ambitions. To a large extent, the charm of Mao Zedong's poems mainly depends on the employment and combination of images. As is known to all, the images in Mao Zedong's poems can be divided into two categories: dynamic images and static images. We will make a contrastive study on the translation of the two categories of images in different English versions.

A. Translation of Dynamic Images

Dynamic images refer to those images which are moving. Mao Zedong's poems are full of dynamic images. He applies active and powerful verbs to shape dynamic images, such as "鹰击长空,鱼翔浅底". In this verse, the verbs"击"and"翔" are more powerful than"飞"and"游". Mao Zedong's poems often represent a kind of energetic beauty because of different verbs. Therefore, when translating these dynamic images, it is demanded that the energetic beauty be preserved. What's more, translators should make use of different dynamic verbs to create the harmony between the source text and target text.

Example 1

Source text: 风雨送春归,飞雪迎春到。

(《卜算子·咏梅》)

Target text 1:

Spring disappears with rain and winds,
And comes with flying snow.

(Barnstone's version)

Target text 2:

Wind and rain escorted spring's departure,

Flying snow welcomes spring's return.

(Chinese official version)

Target text 3:

When spring departed in wind and rain,
With flying snow it's back again.

(Xu's version)

Mao Zedong composed this poem in December of 1961. At that time, anti-China activity was reaching a climax and three years of natural disasters overwhelmed the whole China. What's more, some people had no confidence in their future, and the new republic was on the verge of destruction. After several years, Mao Zedong came back to Hangzhou. Accidentally, he thought of the plum blossom in the snow again. The plum blossom has been frequently praised by many ancient Chinese poets, because it was viewed as a symbol of loftiness. In Mao Zedong's poems, the plum blossom is regarded as an extraordinary spirit to represent the vitality of spring. In this verse, there are two dynamic words: song(送) and ying(迎). When translating them, Barnstone chooses "disappear" and "come" to reach his purpose. The word "disappear" means becoming impossible to see any longer. While "come" means reaching a new place or level; moving towards somebody or something. Clearly, the implicit meaning and emotion are lost. This translation is close to but not faithful to the source text. In the Chinese official version, to pursue accuracy and fidelity, these two words are translated into "escort" and "welcome". "escort" means taking someone somewhere, especially when you are protecting or guarding him or her, and "welcome" means to be glad to accept something. It is not difficult to know that these two words can accurately express what is in the source text. However, "spring" is appeared twice and the artistic conception value is lost. In order to help the target reader understand the meaning better, Xu considers more requirements of target readers. Therefore, he quotes Byron's words: *when we two parted in silence and tears.* So "song(送)" is converted into *"with"* structure, neglecting its original meaning deliberately. The target readers can easily connect it with Byron's words and have the same feeling with the original readers. The beauty in image is realized while the fidelity is in the second place in Mao Zedong's poems.

B. Translation of Static Images

Static images refer to those images which are motionless. In Mao Zedong's poems, static images are mostly composed by nouns which constitute an important part of its beauty. But while translating these static images, translators

are freer to create different images in their own ways. Therefore, it is of great significance to choose appropriate words in translating different static images. For example, the nouns in Mao Zedong's poems, such as"山"(shan)、"水"(shui) and "天"(tian) occupy dominant positions and compose a series of static image. As a result, a comparison of different translation strategies on these static images can be made as follows.

Example 2
Source text:
红军不怕远征难，万水千山只等闲。

<div align="right">（《七律·长征》）</div>

Target text 1:
    The red army is not afraid of hardship on the long march,
    Ten thousand waters and a thousand mountains are nothing.

<div align="right">(Barnstone' s version)</div>

Target text 2:
    The red army fears not the trials of the long march,
    Holding light thousands of rivers and mountains.

<div align="right">(Chinese official version)</div>

Target text 3:
    Of the trying long march the red army makes light,
    Ten thousand crags and torrents are barriers slight.

<div align="right">(Xu' s version)</div>

Mao Zedong composed this poem in the long march. It is not only the heroic epic of Chinese revolution, but also the most precious wealth of Chinese poetry. In October, 1934, the Central Red Army started the long march from Jiangxi Province and Fujian Province. It proceeded westward along the five mountain ridges stretching over the provinces of Jiangxi, Guangdong, Hunan and Huangxi. Afterwards, they walked through the twelve peaks of Wumeng Mountains in Yunan Province in January 1935. Then, they turned to the north. After that, they crossed the river of Golden Sand and River Dadu in Sichuan Province. In September, they climbed over the Min Mountains which were covered with snow all year around. After conquering trackless grass lands, the Red Army finally arrived at the revolutionary base in northern Shaanxi in October, 1936. It is the milestone for both Chinese revolution and the history of poetry. Since then, the Central Member of the Communist Party of China was initially shaped.

In this poem, "wan shui(万水)"and" qian shan(千山)"are used to emphasize the largeness of land, so the accurate figures are not so important for these two static images. In Barnstone's version, they are translated by "ten thousand waters and a thousand mountains", so it is easy for us to find that he translates these two images word for word. He doesn't know the numeral is not a precise concept in poems. Therefore, he makes a translation mistake because he doesn't know much about the basic cultural connotation and Chinese cultural background. As a foreigner, it is hard for him to know the implication of the word. According to this implication, the Chinese official version translates it into "thousands of rivers and mountains". As a result, it is clear to find that it is as precisely as the source text wants to convey. While in Xu' s version, in order to achieve his skopos, he tries his best to decrease the difficulties of target text readers and make them understand Mao Zedong's poems better. Therefore, he employs an English proverb "ten thousand crags and torrents" to translate "wan shui qian shan (万水千山)". On the one hand, he succeeds in translating its implication. On the other hand, he has preserved its beauty in form.

C. Different Translation Strategies on Images

From the above comparison, it is not difficult to find that these three English versions have many differences in translating the images in Mao Zedong's poems. There are many other examples of dynamic images and static images in Mao Zedong's poems. Such as, "五岭逶迤腾细浪，乌蒙磅礴走泥丸"，"山舞银蛇，原驰蜡象". "山(shan)" is a static image, but it becomes dynamic here. A Chinese poem always relies on images to express poet's emotion and ambition. Therefore, a translator should be very careful in translating those images.

By comparing these three different translations of the images in more than 60 poets by Mao Zedong, we have found that three versions have their own characteristics. Barnstone's version can more or less be regarded as a close translation although there are many mistakes in his translation. What's more, some of the implications of images in poems are lost because he doesn't pay much attention to accuracy for words. However, his purpose is to look for an English equivalent to replace the original text. Thus, his version embodies the skopos rule best. He adopts word-for-word translation in order to meet the expectations of western readers.

In official version, fidelity and accuracy of images are emphasized while further explanation does not occur in the translation. Translators of Chinese official version assume that the implication of images can be understood by the target readers. In addition, translators try their best to make the translation accurate and coherent. In translating images, they just translate its literal meaning and ignore the profound meaning and

culture-loaded words. Chinese official version best embodies the fidelity rule.

While Xu's version pays more attention to the receptivity of target readers. He adheres to the Three Beauty Principle in translation, that is, beauty in sense, sound and form. Therefore, in the image translation, he tries his best to achieve his purpose. In his translation, some culture-loaded images are translated into homologous idioms, its connotation is well-achieved. Chinese metrical form is rendered into English classical verse, its beauty in sense is well-kept. Compared to skopos rule and fidelity rule, his version embodies the coherence rule best.

V. CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, as a foreign Sinologist, Barnstone aimed to introduce Mao Zedong's Poems to English readers. In his translation process, he paid much attention to the requirements of target language readers in the English world. Therefore, he tried his best to make his translation easy to understand for English readers by using literal translation. However, because of limitation of his cultural background, there are some unavoidable mistakes in his translation. The Foreign Language Press' version was finished by Mao Zedong Poems Translation Group and published by domestic authorities as the Chinese official version. During the translation process, the Foreign Language Press employed the translation strategy of foreignization and attached great importance to the authority and politicization of the source text. After China's Reform and Opening up, the status of Chinese culture, especially poetry was improved in the world, and translators had a deeper understanding of Mao Zedong's Poems. Considering the reader's aesthetic demands as well as the artistry of poems, Xu Yuanchong emphasized the Three Beauty Principle in the poems and domestication has been adopted.

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